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FOR ENGLAND

POEMS WRITTEN DURING ESTRANGEMENT

43768

BY

WILLIAM WATSON

1853-1935

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LEONARD COURTNEY

DEAR MR. COURTNEY,

The verses which occupy the ensuing pages were inspired by the hope of assisting in the promotion of a reasonable human feeling towards those who were our adversaries in the late epical conflict. It is with an abashed sense of the littleness of my service to a great cause that I ask you to let me link them with your name.

Hazlitt said of Charles James Fox: "His

love of his country did not consist in hatred of the rest of mankind." Unhappily, however, there are many persons whose love of their country appears to consist in nothing else, and from some of these I anticipate a repetition of the charge, already brought against me, of anti-patriotism; an accusation perhaps best treated with disdain, yet in itself so odious, that to suffer it without impatience is difficult. Especially is it odious to one who has prided himself on being peculiarly English in his sympathies and sentiments, and who comes of many generations of such Englishmen as fought indomitably for faith and commonweal, such Englishwomen as lived the beautiful ancient

life of our pastoral highlands, in the lee of northern hills and by the flowing of Swale and Ure. To one conscious of these noble origins, conscious, too, of having loved his country with the vigilant love that cannot brook a shadow upon her honour, the charge of being against her because he deplores her temporary attitude and action, brings a kind of amazement that has in it something akin to despair. But hope returns at last—the hope, nay, the assurance, that the spirit of detraction and falsification is no true English growth, and must presently perish, or seek some fitter soil and clime.

You, at any rate, will not accuse me of inconstancy to my beloved and worshipped

homeland—you who have endured a kindred obloquy in greater measure, proportioned to your greater courage and achievement.

I remain, with high respect,

Sincerely yours,

WILLIAM WATSON.

NOTE

THESE poems, with two exceptions, have already appeared in the Daily News, *the* Speaker, *the* Westminster Gazette, *the* Saturday Review, *the* Fortnightly Review, *and the* Cornhill Magazine, *to whose respective Editors my thanks are due for permission to republish.*

W. W.

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FOR ENGLAND

I

THE ENEMY

UNSKILLED in Letters, and in Arts unversed;
Ignorant of empire; bounded in their view
By the lone billowing veldt, where they upgrew
Amid great silences; a people nursed
Apart—the far-sown seed of them that erst
Not Alva's sword could tame: now, blindly hurled
Against the march of the majestic world,
They fight and die, with dauntless bosoms curst.

Crazed, if you will; demented, not to yield
Ere all be lost! And yet it seems to me
They fought as noblest Englishmen did use
To fight, for freedom; and no Briton he,
Who to such valour in a desperate field
A knightly salutation can refuse.

PAST AND PRESENT

WHEN lofty Spain came towering up the seas
This little stubborn land to daunt and quell,
The winds of heaven were our auxiliaries,
And smote her, that she fell.

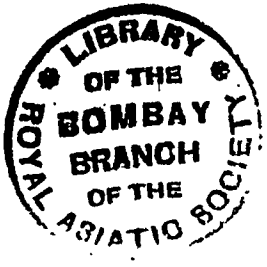
Ah, not to-day is Nature on our side!
The mountains and the rivers are our foe.
And Nature with the heart of man allied
Is hard to overthrow.

III

ON BEING STYLED "PRO-BOER"

FRIEND, call me what you will: no jot care I:
I that shall stand for England till I die.
England! The England that rejoiced to see
Hellas unbound, Italy one and free;
The England that had tears for Poland's doom,
And in her heart for all the world made room;

The England from whose side I have not
swerved;
The immortal England whom I, too, have
served,
Accounting her all living lands above,
In Justice, and in Mercy, and in Love.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V

"LENIENCY"

WHAT voice is this, of bale and wrath ?
"We have not burned enough, or slain ;
Too little havoc marks our path ;
We are too gentle, too humane.

"From countless roof-trees be there rolled
The smoke of expiatory fires !
More incense yet an hundredfold
The unsated God of War requires."

Blind from the first, blind to the end,
  Blind to all signs that ask men's gaze!
In vain by lips of foe or friend
  The world cries shame upon your ways.

Blind beyond cure! Despoil and burn;
  Fling forth the helpless — babes as well;
And let the children's children learn
  To hate us with the hate of hell.

From whatsoever taint remain
  Of lingering justice in our heart,
Purge us: erase the poor last stain
  Of pity; yea, act out your part;

Speed us along the downward track;
Delay the dawn, defeat the light;
And thrust the human spirit back
Into the night, into the night.

V

FORCE AND FREEDOM

Oh, doubtless ye can trample and enchain,
Sow death and breathe out winter; but can ye
Persuade the destined bondsman he is free,
Or with a signal build the summer again?
Oh, ye can hold the rivulets of the plain
A little while from nuptials with the sea,
But the fierce mountain-stream of Liberty
Not edicts and not hosts may long restrain.
For this is of the heights and of the deeps,

Born of the heights and in the deeps conceived
This, 'mid the lofty places of the mind,
Gushes pellucid, vehemently upheaved;
And tears and heart's blood hallow it, as it sweeps
Invincibly on, co-during with mankind.

VI

TO ONE ESPOUSING UNPOPULAR TRUTH

Not yet, dejected though thy cause, despair,
Nor doubt of Dawn for all her laggard wing.
In shrewdest March the earth was mellowing,
And had conceived the Summer unaware.
With delicate ministration, like the air,
The sovereign forces that conspire to bring

Light out of darkness, out of Winter
Sl ,
Perform unseen their tasks benign and fair.
The sower soweth seed o'er vale and hill,
And long the folded life waits to be born ;
Yet hath it never slept, nor once been still :
And clouds and suns have served it night
and morn ;
The winds are of its secret council sworn ;
And Time and nurturing Silence work its
will.

VII

LAMENTATION

O EARLY fall'n, uncrowned with envied laurel,
O lives that nameless come and noteless go,
Our vainly brave in an ignoble quarrel,
That fought unhating an unhating foe!

Ye pass, ye cease; in alien dust your dust is;
Carnage and tears depart not, wrath remains;

And Power derides the lips that counsel justice,
And nations wonder, and the world arraigns.

And foresight of how long the end yet tarries
To no man born of woman hath He given,
Who marshals all His flashing legionaries
Nightly upon the silent field of heaven.

VIII

MELANCHOLIA

In the cold starlight, on the barren beach,
Where to the stones the rent sea-tresses clave,
I heard the long hiss of the backward wave
Down the steep shingle, and the hollow speech
Of murmurous cavern-lips, nor other breach
Of ancient silence. None was with me, save
Thoughts that were neither glad nor sweet nor brave,

But restless comrades, each the foe of each.
And I beheld the waters in their might
Writhe as a dragon by some great spell curbed
And foiled; and one lone sail; and over me
The everlasting taciturnity;
The august, inhospitable, inhuman night,
Glittering magnificently unperturbed.

IX

ACHIEVEMENT

WHO says we fail? We prosper beyond dreams.
As architects of ruin we have no peers.
We thought to fire but farmsteads: we have lit
A flame less transient in the hearts of men.
We are ill at building? Yet have we at least
Destroyed to better purpose than we knew.
We have raised up heroes where we found but hinds,

We have ravaged well, our rapine is not
vain.
Redder from our red hoof-prints the wild
rose
Of freedom shall afresh hereafter spring,
And in our own despite are we the sires
Of liberty, as night begets the day.
Sufficient claim to memory this I deem,
Title enow, were other passport none.

X

ROME AND ANOTHER

SHE asked for all things, and dominion such
As never man had known,
The gods first gave; then lightly, touch by touch,
O'erthrew her seven-hilled throne.

Imperial Power, that hungerest for the globe,
Restrain thy conquering feet,
Lest the same Fates that spun thy purple robe
Should weave thy winding-sheet.

XI

THE INEXORABLE LAW

WE too shall pass, we too shall disappear,
Ev'n as the mighty nations that have waned
And perished. Not more surely are ordained
The crescence and the cadence of the year,
High-hearted June, October spent and sere,
Than this gray consummation. We have reigned
Augustly; let our part be so sustained
That Time, far hence, shall hold our memory dear!

Let it be said : " This Mistress of the sword
And conquering prow, this Empire swoln
with spoils,
Yet served the human cause, yet strove for
Man ;
Hers was the purest greatness we record ;
We whose ingathered sheaves her tilth
foreran,
Whose peace comes of her tempests and
her toils."

XII

AN IDEAL PASSION

NOT she, the England I behold,
  My mistress is ; nor yet
The England beautiful of old,
  Whom Englishmen forget.

The England of my heart is she,
  Long hoped and long deferred,
That ever promises to be,
  And ever breaks her word.

XIII

THE UNSUBDUED

OUR tears, our wounds, our sacrifices! Yea,
But what of theirs, whose monstrous agony towers,
Darkening the noon? Their woe outmatches ours
As Alps the Wrekin. No soft hands allay
Their giant pain. A whole world's wonder, they
Fight their lorn fight against invincible powers.

From earth's rough breast their tragic valour flowers,
Fostered in tempest through the thunderous day.
Calamity makes them great. Have we alone
No eyes, when all men witness and acclaim?
The sound of their rude warriorship is blown
From land to land. Earth shouts afar their fame.
Bruised, broken in shards, this people nought can tame;
They have a heart that cannot be o'erthrown.

XIV

GREETING

(Lines read at a meeting of Englishwomen)

I GREET you and am with you, Friends of
Peace,
Of Equity, of Freedom. 'Tis an hour
Inhospitable to Reason's tempering word ;
Yet, being brave, being women, you will
speak
The thought that must be spoken, without
fear.
The Voice of Chivalry grows faint ; the note
Of Patriotism is well-nigh overborne.

For what is Patriotism but noble care
For our own country's honour in mens' eyes,
And zeal for the just glory of her arms ?
If it be aught but this we'll none of it.
Keep then that zeal, that noble care alive ;
Keep then from altogether perishing
The light of the authentic patriot flame :
Even as another remnant kept it clear,
When in an England errant from herself
A dull King and his purblind counsellors
Goaded the New World to fling off the Old.
And in this hour when England half forgets
That Empire dies not starved but surfeited,
Warn her that tho' she 'whelm a kindred race,

A valiant people, stubborn-built as we,
Yet shall they gnarr hereafter at her heel,
Secretly unsubdued though beaten down;
Too near ourselves to be in spirit o'ercome
But on fierce memories fed, and evermore
Upborne in heart by the saluting world.

XV

A LAODICEAN

TIMOROUS, hesitant voice, how utterly vile
I hold you!
Voice without wrath, without ruth—
empty of hate as of love!
Different notes from these, O watchman,
blow to the midnight!
Loud, in a deep-lulled land, trumpeter,
sound an alarm!

XVI

FOR ENGLAND

Of all great deaths on English ground, thine most,
Simon de Montfort, doth my spirit stir.
Thou fought'st for England and didst die for her,
Thyself of other race, from outland coast.
Law's mandatory and Freedom's, thou thy host
Didst hurl against a sceptred law-breaker;
Nor didst thou blench when, black from plume to spur,

Rode Fate on Evesham field, and all was lost.
Then for their lives thou bad'st thy noblest fly:
"Thou dying we would not live," they made reply,
And dauntless round thy dauntlessness were mown;
And thou with wrath that hewed its way on high
Fell'st fighting the steep fight of Liberty,
In a crashing forest of the foe, alone.

XVII

METAMORPHOSIS

THE golden voices of the nobler day,
Uttering the Statesman's or the Sage's thought,
Or from the Muse's mountain fastness blown;
Great voices of great lovers of their land;
All have departed, all return no more.
What of their mighty Mistress, her whom these
Gloried to serve? Behold, she staggers forth,

Paving her path with babes and sucklings slain;
Shouting her own applause, if haply so
She may shout down the hisses of the world;
Warned vainly, and rebuked by all her Past;
England, our ancient England, strange and new!

O loveliness transformed, what Comus-wand
Hath touched thee? What enchantment hath prevailed,
That thou so deep descendest from so high,

Fall'n to this Ogre's work, more meet for them
That painted crimson the Anatolian snows ?

At least one singer, honouring evermore
Thine inmost soul through all its outward change,
Shall not, in life's last passion of farewell,
When the dark wings close over him, bear hence
The dreadful memory, that he once blasphemed,
With benison on cruelty bestowed,
The holy spirit of song ; or stood at gaze,
Unto these deaths consenting, foully mute.

XVIII

HARVEST

A NAKED people in captivity;
A land where Desolation hath her throne;
The wrath that is, the rage that is to be:
Our fruits, whereby we are known.

XIX

THE SLAIN

PARTNERS in silence, mates in noteless doom,
Peers in oblivion's commonalty merged ;
Unto like deeds by differing mandates urged,
And equalled in the unrespective tomb ;
Leal or perfidious, cruel or tender, whom
Precipitate fate hath of your frailties purged ;
Whom duly the impartial winds have dirged,

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In autumn or the glorying vernal bloom :'
Already is your strife become as nought ;
Idle the bullet's flight, the bayonet's thrust,
The senseless cannon's dull, unmeaning word ;
Idle your feud ; and all for which ye fought
To this arbitrament of loam referred,
And cold adjudication of the dust.

XX

THE TRAGIC CHANGE

To follow Truth was yesterday
To England's heart the surest way.
Follow her now, and thou shalt share
An exile's fate, an exile's fare.

XXI

LINES TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JAMES BRYCE, M.P.

IN ANSWER TO A LETTER

THANKS for your heartening word, that
came from one
Acquainted with the story of many peoples,
Acquainted with the life of many peoples ;
An honoured labourer for the amity
And weal of peoples, loftier things than
sway.

Thanks for your heartening word, that came to one
Fated to hoist a somewhat lonely sail,
Against the wind and tide; that came to one
Fated to be at variance with the time,
Touching the parts it hisses or applauds;
Who liefer would sit mute, and be withdrawn
Far into some consolatory Past,
Among old voices, the unperishing,
Save that such words of cheer the courier Hours
Bring when most needed, words restorative,
Coming across the silence or dispraise,
Coming across the welter and the gloom.

I lose not hope or faith in this great land,
This many-victoried, many-heroed land,
Though hope oft sinks, and faith is hard to hold.
She that with ruthless John and truthless Charles,
And James the despicable, by voice or sword
Strove, and not vainly, for her liberties;
She that from him, the humbler of the world,
Whose thunderous heel was on submitted thrones,
Kept whole and virginal her liberties;
She that so joyed at sound of other lands
Heaved high with passion for their liberties;

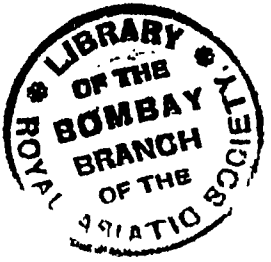
Shall yet win back—'tis thus at least I dream,
Being her lover, and dreaming from the heart—
Shall yet win back her lost and wandering soul,
Shall yet recall herself from banishment;
Shall yet remember—she forgets to-day—
How the munificent hands of Life are full
Of gifts more covetable an hundredfold
Than man's dominion o'er reluctant man;
And come upon old wealth disused and idle,
Her scorned estate and slighted patrimony,
Auriferous veins in all the field of being,

With those shy treasures no self-seeking wins,
Rather self-search, and grace of fortunate hours.

The Cæsars and the Alexanders pass,
Whilst he that drank the hemlock, he that drank
The Cup more dread, on Calvary hill, remain,
Servants and mighty conquerors of the world.

The great achievement of the human mind
Is the idea of Justice. More than arts
And sciences, than faiths and rituals, this
Lifts all our life above the life of beasts.

Chiefly by this are we a nobler kind,
The Earth's elect and separate; lost to this,
Our state is as the state of beasts indeed,
That snatch their meat, one from another's
mouth,
And without pain another's pain behold;
Though these are guiltless, knowing not
light or law.



XXII

THE TRUE IMPERIALISM

Here, while the tide of conquest rolls
  Against the distant golden shore,
The starved and stunted human souls
  Are with us more and more.

Vain is your Science, vain your Art,
  Your triumphs and your glories vain,
To feed the hunger of their heart
  And famine of their brain.

Your savage deserts howling near,
Your wastes of ignorance, vice, and shame,—
Is there no room for victories here,
No field for deeds of fame?

Arise and conquer while ye can
The foe that in your midst resides,
And build within the mind of Man
The Empire that abides.

XXIII

THE DRAGONS

PRINCE VORTIGERN—so run the ancient tales—
A stronghold sought to build in wildest Wales;
But some fell Power frustrated each assay,
And nightly wrecked the labours of the day;
Till Merlin came, and bade the builders all,
Beneath the escarp'd and many-bastioned wall,
Dig deep; and lo, two dragons, o'er whose lair
Nothing secure might rise, lay sleeping there.

Search the foundations, you that build a State;
For if the dragon forms of Wrath and Hate
Lie coiled below, and darkly bide their hour,
Fear walks the rampart, Fear ascends the tower.
And let it not content you that they sleep:
Drive them with strong enchantments to the deep.
First of such charms is Perfect Justice; then
Comes the heart's word that conquers beasts and men.
No other craft shall serve—no spells but these
Drive the old dragons to the whelming seas.

*

XXIV

ALPHA AND OMEGA

He throned her in the gateways of the
world,
He 'stablished her on high before the
peoples.

He raised her as a watch-tower from the
wave,
He built her as a lighthouse on the waters.

He maketh and unmaketh without end,
And He alone, who is first and last, shall
judge her.

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